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*A Plea for the
Historical Teaching of History*

AN INAUGURAL LECTURE
DELIVERED ON NOVEMBER 9, 1904

BY

C. H. FIRTH, M.A.

REGIUS PROFESSOR OF MODERN HISTORY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

SECOND EDITION

OXFORD
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS
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HENRY FROWDE, M.A.
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PREFACE

THIS lecture is a plea for giving future historians a proper professional training in Oxford, and therefore an attack on the system of historical education which renders it impossible. It is not an attack on the individuals engaged in working that system, but an invitation to them to assist in devising and working something better. I learn with regret that a passage on p. 30 has been construed by some of the teachers of Modern History as if it were a personal reflection upon themselves. It was not so intended, and had I thought it could be so taken I should have expressed myself differently. When I speak of 'a proper professional training for the study of history,' I mean such a technical training as French and German Universities give to future historians—that is, a training in the methods of investigation, in the use of original authorities, and in those auxiliary sciences which the Germans call 'Hilfswissenschaften.' To say that colleges have not hitherto regarded this training as a necessary requisite for the teaching of history is stating a notorious fact. Nearly all of us who teach history in Oxford have received no training of this kind. In this respect we are self-taught. Whatever technical knowledge we possess we have had to obtain by ourselves after we became teachers, instead of before we began to teach. We have had to learn laboriously, and often imperfectly, what under a better system we might have been taught

scientifically and quickly. I myself had no preparation for the study of history but the inadequate one of the Modern History School. Therefore, I felt the want of 'a proper professional training' as soon as I began to work seriously at history, and when I was appointed a college lecturer on the subject. I feel it still more now that I am trying to teach others scientific methods which I have learnt bit by bit, not systematically, and which I have not been accustomed to see employed in teaching. When I describe the system of education which we have gone through as not 'a proper professional training,' my fellow-sufferers must not think I am casting reflections upon them. On the contrary, I am seeking to ensure that the next generation of Oxford historians shall not labour under our disadvantages, but shall enjoy the educational advantages which a young Frenchman or German enjoys.

The attitude of the colleges to this question is all-important. They can help the study of history here a great deal, and that without any expense to themselves, if they exact from those to whom they give fellowships and tutorships the possession of an adequate technical training. They will harm it a great deal if they continue not to do so. It is for this reason that I have sought to draw the attention of the College authorities to the problem.

C. H. FIRTH.

November 14, 1904.

A PLEA FOR THE HISTORICAL TEACHING OF HISTORY

EVERY man who accepts a new duty must begin with some self-examination. He must define for himself the nature of that duty, and estimate for himself his power to fulfil it. I have undertaken no easy office. As I stand here there rises to my mind the memory of some who preceded me as professors, men I saw and heard. Two were my friends; one was my teacher; another one of the greatest English writers of the nineteenth century. I will not try to characterize them. All four knew many things I do not know, and possessed qualifications I do not possess for the office they filled amongst us—knowledge of larger portions of the world's history, greater acquirements, and greater gifts of nature. Yet while conscious of my own deficiencies, and wishing that I had this man's art or that man's scope, I am sure that I can do some service in the teaching of my subject, if I can obtain the co-operation of the rest of its teachers, and the sympathy of the University for the aims I set before me.

It is a wise custom, though a burdensome one, which obliges each new teacher at his first appearance to set forth what he thinks of his subject, and what method of teaching it he proposes to adopt. And first of all, what he thinks of his subject. History is not easy to define; but to me it seems to mean the record of the life of societies of men, of the changes which those societies have gone through, of the ideas which have determined the actions of those societies, and of the material conditions which have helped or hindered

their development. Nor is it only a branch of learning to be studied for its own sake, but a kind of knowledge which is useful to men in daily life, 'the end and scope of all history being,' as Sir Walter Raleigh says, 'to teach us by example of times past such wisdom as may guide our desires and actions.' Therefore to know what was, and what came to pass, and why it came to pass, and to represent both with fidelity for the instruction of later men, is the office of the historian. Here on the threshold arises the familiar dispute about the nature of the historian's task. Is history a science or an art? Men give opposite answers according to their conception of the methods and the objects of the historian. One tells us that history is a science, nothing more and nothing less; another that it is an art, and that one only succeeds in it by imagination. To me truth seems to lie between these two extremes. History is neither, but it partakes of the nature of both. A two-fold task lies before the historian. One half of his business is the discovery of the truth, and the other half its representation. And these are two tasks different in kind, and demanding very different qualities in the man who undertakes them.

The discovery of the truth is a scientific process. The historian finds out what the life of a given society was by means of the records it has left behind it. These records are of many kinds; a cathedral and a castle, a picture and a monument, are just as much records as documents, and in some cases they are the only records we have. You will remember how Professor York Powell insisted on this point. In the main, however, the written or printed word is the kind of record upon which history must be based. To search for these records and to collect the evidence they supply is the

first business of the historian. At the same time he has to weigh and to sift the materials he is collecting, to separate the true evidence from the false, and the trivial from the essential.

Now this first part of the historian's task is purely scientific. The process by which he collects his facts and determines their value, is like the process by which the man of science gathers and weighs the results of his experiments and observations. As the materials with which these two deal differ in their nature their methods must differ in detail; nor can the historian obtain such exact and certain results as the man of science, but the spirit in which both conduct their investigations must be the same.

When he has discovered the truth the second part of the historian's task begins. He has to state the truth as it appears to him. He has to combine his facts, and to construct something out of them, either a description, or a story, or a demonstration. All his facts are equally true, but all are not equally important. He must select certain facts and bring them into prominence, and put other facts in the background, or even leave them out altogether as unimportant. He must show the connexion of these facts with each other, and their causes and results. By this process of selection and arrangement he endeavours to reproduce the effect which the whole of the evidence has produced upon his mind. As we say familiarly 'he puts his ideas upon paper'; that is, he strives to embody in some material form a conception of the past which is floating in his head. And this work of combination, construction, and re-creation is essentially artistic rather than scientific in its nature.

In each part of the historian's work he is brought face to face with its peculiar difficulties. When a

man has familiarized himself with the evidence upon which the history of a particular period must be based, the difficulty of representing it comes home to him. How is he to compress into a small space a faithful representation of the life of the time, to represent the whole life in all its variety and complexity? Suppose that, for a moment, the portion of the past he is studying seems to rise before him like a live thing with all its colour and all its movement, how is he to fix this fleeting vision upon paper and express it in words? His canvas is too narrow, his tools are too imperfect; and the more he strives, the more the limitations of his art are forced upon him. Shakespeare felt them when he complained of the difficulty of 'turning the accomplishment of many years into an hour-glass' and presenting on the unworthy scaffold of the Globe events which, 'in their huge and proper life,' filled 'the vasty fields of France.' Any man who seeks to represent human life through any medium feels it too.

In the scientific part of his task also, the historian must feel the difficulty of finding out the truth. If we go back to early times, the imperfect nature of the evidence is forced upon us at every moment. It is often a question of the interpretation of a single sentence or the trustworthiness of a single document. Even in dealing with better known periods, such as the seventeenth century, the same difficulty arises. Often the really conclusive document is missing; we know that something happened, but the piece of evidence which would explain why it happened is non-existent, and the precise significance of the fact becomes a matter for inference or conjecture. Sometimes a whole series of documents dealing with a par-

ticular episode has perished by accident or design, and shreds and patches of evidence must be collected from different sources to supply its absence¹.

As we approach our own day a new difficulty arises. If the historian of earlier times suffers from the paucity of his materials, the historian of modern times suffers from their superabundance. One life is too short to search through them. A mere catalogue of parliamentary reports fills a whole volume, and who shall number the volumes of Hansard?

Everywhere, therefore, the historian is made conscious of the limitations of his own knowledge about the past, and the limitations of men's possible knowledge. He feels that he moves in a little circle of light, seeing as far as his little candle throws its beams; and beyond that comes darkness. The wisest historians I have known recognized most fully how little they could know about the times they knew best; admitted the provisional nature of some of their conclusions, and were careful to distinguish between what was really certain, and what was only probable.

Thus the historian is doubly limited; first by the difficulty of finding out the facts, and then by the difficulty of representing them. Even if he seems for the moment to overcome both difficulties, how transitory

¹ For instance, in May, 1646, before surrendering Oxford, the councillors of the king burnt all the records of the Parliament which he held here, and with them a mass of official correspondence relating to the king's policy during the war. Or, to take another instance, we have no reports of the debates of the House of Commons from 1661

to 1667—eventful years in which the Restoration settlement was being worked out, and there is no evidence to show that such reports ever existed. When so little can be known about public events of such importance and magnitude, you can imagine how difficult it is to find out the truth about smaller incidents or secrets of state.

and fragile is the reputation of histories that were welcomed as perfect in their day! New documents are discovered, new facts come to light, accepted theories are overthrown. Nor is it only the details that are altered by fresh discoveries: the outline of the past seems to change as it grows more remote. The point of view is continually changing, and the relative importance of facts alters with it. For each age looks back upon the past from a different altitude, and with fresh eyes, demanding from him who tells the story the answer to new questions. It wants the history written over again to suit itself. So through this constant shifting of the perspective, as well as through the discovery of fresh evidence, standard histories grow imperceptibly obsolete, and become at last 'alms for oblivion.' Only those endure in which the matter is so solid and the form so perfect, and both so harmoniously united, that they still satisfy and charm, and seem to triumph over time. Only those endure in which the individuality of the writer is so impressed upon the book that it seems 'to embalm and treasure up the precious life-blood of a master spirit,' and becomes part of literature.

For the rest of historians, who are not Gibbons or Macaulays—even for the best of them—'diuturnity,' as Sir Thomas Browne says, 'is a dream,' and 'folly of expectation.' And yet this is but half the truth. Some of you no doubt have read that masterly sketch of the development of historical learning in France with which Monod, in 1876, prefaced the first number of the *Revue Historique*. I read it some five-and-twenty years ago; and I remember that when I first read that long muster-roll of dead scholars a certain feeling of melancholy came over me. So many notable workers in the field

of history, men that lived laborious days and scorned delights, whose very names for the most part even students of history have never heard of, names become as much shadows as the men themselves, mere concatenations of vowels and consonants signifying nothing. Then I saw the fruit of their laborious days. What each contributed to men's knowledge of the past was not lost, but a part of that common stock which one generation handed on to the next, and all increased: blended and absorbed and transformed it lived still, a drop in the widening river, a spark in the larger light which illuminated the past of France. For the impersonal part of each man's work, for that addition to knowledge, diuturnity was not a dream but a reality. It was this concrete example which made the trite old phrase about 'adding to knowledge' something more than words to me. And if the study of history means an endeavour to add to this common inheritance of knowledge, surely the teaching of history means an endeavour to train men capable of adding to knowledge? This, at all events, is the principle upon which I base my conception of my duty here.

If you wish to fit yourself either to study history or to teach it, there is only one way and no other. When we begin reading we are insatiably curious; all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them seem to lie open before us in our books; we have only to enter in and take possession. When we are sober we resolve to know one thing, if we can. The first step that a man must take after he has laid his foundation of general knowledge, is to concentrate his endeavour upon some definite and limited field. This implies, as all concentration must, some renunciation, some self-discipline,

some restraint of wandering desires ; but it brings its reward at once.

By close examination of some chronicle or memoir, document or set of documents, he learns the nature of the materials out of which history is made, and by the attempt to construct some small thing he learns how the fabric must be built up out of them. This is his apprenticeship ; he finds out how to handle his tools, and becomes a good craftsman fit for larger enterprises. He understands now what the difficulties of the historian are and how to overcome them.

Do not think that this concentration on one period is a narrowing process. It may become so, but it need not be so. To understand one thing it is necessary to know so many others, that a man is always learning something new. If you wish to understand what Englishmen were thinking about government in the seventeenth century you must know something about what men thought at Rome and Athens. If you wish to understand their religious ideas you must know what men believed at Wittenberg and Geneva, and in older cities too. Even if you seek to chronicle bare facts only, you must look across the water to see what men were doing in France and Germany in order to understand what happened in England. Dr. Gardiner gave himself up more entirely to the study of one period than any other English historian has ever done, and yet he is the least insular of English historians. The unity of history is not only in its continuity, but in its integrity ; it implies regarding the past as a whole, and therefore studying every side of your chosen portion, as well as looking before and after it. Study a period in this way and your horizon

continually widens; every question opens up vistas into the past and the future; you catch sight of those larger problems which men have been trying to solve for centuries and have not solved yet; you perceive the great forces which moulded the past as they penetrate your corner of it and shape its history; your little pool feels every wind and reflects the stars; your little plot of ground becomes a miniature world, reproducing the greater one without. So from the understanding of a part you arrive gradually at some conception of the meaning of the whole, you proceed from the particular to the universal.

This concentration of endeavour is not only the best way of learning to understand history, but the only way of adding to men's knowledge of it. The time has gone by when one man could sit down in his study and undertake to write a continuous history of England or France; and it will not come again in our days. We must first make the foundations sure; and few people realize how much there is still to be done in every department of English history. Take for example the history of the last three or four centuries.

The field is large and only half tilled. Year by year the printed evidence increases as new Calendars of State Papers, and Reports of the Historical MSS. Commission come out; but the bulk of the information these volumes supply remains unused. In England the publication of materials has outstripped the capacity of our historical workmen to utilize them. Besides this, there are great collections of written evidence in the Record Office and the British Museum which are practically unworked mines; no one knows what they may yield

when they are carefully examined. We want workers to grapple with this mass of print and manuscript, to extract and digest, and put in order the evidence it contains; and to embody it in monographs on particular subjects, so that the result may become part of the common stock of knowledge and be incorporated in the story of our country. If that story is ever to be rightly told, the work needs the co-operation of many hands, above all, many skilled hands. At present there is no place in England where men are properly trained for that work. We do very little here in Oxford to train men for it¹.

Our Modern History School was never so large and so flourishing as it now is. Last summer there were some 215 candidates, men and women, and there must be now 400 or 500 persons reading for it. From my point of view it has one great defect. It does not train men capable of adding to knowledge. It produces very few historians. I have gone through the class list for the last twenty years with great care, and it is surprising to note how rarely one finds there the name of a man who has since published historical work of any kind, still less historical work of any value. An historian

¹ The historical curriculum of Cambridge is open to nearly all the criticisms which apply to that of Oxford, though it has the merit of giving those who take the degree course a larger knowledge of general European history. At Manchester a systematic attempt is made to give students of mediaeval English history a scientific training. In London there are at present courses on

paleography and on the sources of English history (mediaeval and sixteenth century) at the School of Economics, but the continued existence of these courses is problematic, as they are defrayed by voluntary subscriptions. At none of the Universities is there any adequate and systematic training given for students of more modern history, English or European.

seems to be merely an accidental by-product of the school, and not one of the natural results of our elaborate system of teaching.

The best answer to this complaint which I have heard is that the school cannot reasonably be expected to produce historians. History is its instrument, not its object. All it attempts to do is to give men who do not wish to study classics, or mathematics, or science, a sort of general education through history. In this way the school performs a useful function. It produces well-informed politicians and journalists, good civil servants, and many useful persons in less conspicuous spheres:—

‘Men that every virtue decks,
And women, models of their sex,
Society’s true ornaments.’

On the other hand, if the school does not undertake to give a professional training, but merely to sharpen the intellects and enlarge the minds of those who go through it, then the training given in the school is too narrow. Attention is directed too exclusively to politics and institutions; and the memory of candidates is filled with facts about these things, without sufficient endeavour to make them grasp the ideas which explain the facts. The literature which is the expression of the ideas is not studied; yet English history and English literature are so inseparably connected that it is impossible to understand the one without the other. This is recognized in the English School by the provision that ‘candidates shall show a competent knowledge of the history, especially of the social history, of England, during any period of English literature which they offer’; and that they shall ‘study the prescribed books

in relation to the thought and history of the period to which they belong.' It is recognized also in the Regulations of the History School with regard to European history, by the provision that 'candidates will be expected to make themselves acquainted with the social and literary history of their period.' In practice these provisions remain a dead letter; occasional questions on the subjects mentioned are set by the examiners, but the answers reveal plainly that the teaching required to make these phrases a reality does not exist. On this point the evidence of the lecture lists confirms the evidence of the papers sent in by the candidates.

Now though it may be needful to keep the examinations in the two subjects distinct, the teachers in the two schools ought to co-operate. The Modern History teachers should remember that the introduction of this provision in the statute establishing the Literature School was mainly their work, and should do something to carry it out. May we not hope too, now that we have at last a professor of English Literature, that he will consider candidates for the Modern History School as part of the flock he is intended to instruct? At present these hungry sheep look up and are not fed, but painfully swollen with a mass of undigested facts.

Another subject unduly neglected in the working of the School is the social and economic history of England. Though it has a more prominent place in the regulations than English literature, its importance is not sufficiently recognized either in the actual teaching given, or in the reading done by the candidates. It is examined in; but it is neither sufficiently studied nor

adequately taught. A special teacher of economic history is needed, not only to reinforce and bring up to the mark the teaching of that subject in the History School, but also to assist the Professor of Political Economy in preparing candidates for the Economic diploma. Just as no scheme of teaching can be regarded as complete which omits to use the national literature to explain the national life, so none is complete which omits the study of the material conditions under which the political and social life of the nation developed itself.

Finally there is one more direction in which the curriculum of the School requires expansion. If it does not make knowledge of the past its paramount aim, it should at least equip men better for dealing with the problems of the present. It should include amongst its subjects the history of the British Empire during the nineteenth century, instead of stopping short in 1837. In France, in Germany, and in America, nineteenth-century history, national and European, has a permanent place in historical studies. It is not considered unfit for teaching, or unworthy of serious study; nor is it held that historical teachers or students are incapable of studying it without displays of party feeling. We have lately made a beginning here by extending the limit of European history from 1815 to 1878; it remains to take the next step and apply the same treatment to English history. One reason which imperatively dictates this inclusion of nineteenth-century history is the necessity of giving Colonial history an adequate place in the higher teaching of the University.

We must rectify our historical perspective. Three

hundred years ago an Elizabethan poet predicted the expansion of the English language.

‘Who, in time, knows whither we may vent
The treasure of our tongue? To what strange shores
This gain of our best glory shall be sent,
To enrich unknowing nations with our stores?
What worlds in th’ yet unformèd occident
May come refin’d with th’ accents that are ours¹?’

His dream has come true. The natural boundaries of English history, like those of English Literature, are the limits of our language. Its political boundaries are not precisely coterminous, but our scheme of studies here should find room for the history of every English-speaking community where our flag flies. It should be imperial in its conception of what English history is. The promised foundation of a professorship of Colonial History offers us a chance of making our school at once more scientifically complete and more practically useful. Here, if anywhere, the teaching of Colonial history in a scientific spirit is feasible; because here it can be connected in a natural and easy way with the study of general history, with the study of the traditions our colonists share with us, and the institutions they transplanted with them.

I make these suggestions and criticisms with a view to increasing the practical usefulness of the school of Modern History. Keep it a general education if you will, but make it in Milton’s phrase a more ‘complete and generous education.’ Nevertheless, I cannot accept the purely utilitarian view of the functions of the School. I agree that it does give the ordinary man by means of history a training which is of some real value to him. I complain that it does extremely little for the exceptional

¹ Samuel Daniel, *Musophilus*, 1602.

man who wishes to study history for its own sake. There are always a few men who take the subject with the idea of making history the study of their lives ; with a vague belief that the school will give them a sort of professional training, and a modest hope that they may some day be able to add to the world's knowledge about its past. Let us see what sort of a training the school gives these men. At the end of two years we turn out our man, even our first-class man, unable to read MSS. unless they are very modern ones, unaccustomed to handle original authorities, and without any knowledge of historical bibliography. In most cases he has very little acquaintance with modern languages. Our young Oxford historian is not equipped with any of the special knowledge needed for the pursuit of independent researches and the production of work of lasting value. And yet the most fatal thing is not his lack of a scholar's equipment : but that he has not acquired the mental habits of a scholar. He has remained too long the passive recipient of other men's knowledge. He has been taught results instead of methods ; not how to find out, but what to remember. }

The literary side of his training has been almost as defective as the scientific. The test for which he has been prepared is to compose a number of short historical essays. He has had to do ten papers of three hours each, and in the thirty hours of the examination he has written forty or fifty such essays. This monotonous exercise tests his memory, his presence of mind, and his rhetorical skill, with great efficiency.

It is an excellent training for journalists, and it may be the only way of comparing the intellectual quality of very different men ; but it is a poor test of historical

ability, and a poorer preparation for the task of writing history. When your man sets to work at that, he finds a very different kind of test imposed upon him. He has not to compose a short and simple essay, but a complicated piece of exposition or a lengthy narrative. Instead of relying upon the few facts he can carry in his head he has his books before him, and his difficulty is to select from the multitude of facts which they contain. To reduce these superabundant facts into order, to show their connexion with each other, and to distinguish the true statement from the false, is what he has to do, and in doing it he is not limited to a fixed number of minutes. Judgement is now more needed than memory, constructive skill than fluency. He finds that the qualities which his training did very little to cultivate are more important than those it developed at their expense. The exercises of the parade-ground have not prepared him for the campaign. The only piece of historical work which one of our young men does under what may be called 'service conditions' is the production of an essay for one of the University prizes. By one of the ironies of our educational system, this is a piece of work which counts for nothing when the question whether he is a first- or second-class man comes to be decided. It would be the simplest thing in the world to ask the examiners who look over the Stanhope and the Lothian to classify these essays as well as to pick out the best one, and to empower the examiners in the History School to take that verdict into account when they award honours in History. They might add the result of the one real test of historical ability to the results of the ten conventional tests. If this is thought undesirable, some composition

of the same kind, written outside the schools, could be substituted for one of the special-subject papers. In some way or other a piece of historical work done under the normal conditions of historical work should form part of men's training in the History School, and have a share in the final estimate of their merit.

Since our future historian cannot obtain the special training he needs in the Modern History School, the question arises where he is to obtain it. Is he to get it in Oxford at all, or must he go to Paris or the Universities of Germany to find it? Now though it is desirable that some should go abroad to get this training, it is not possible for all to do so, and therefore it is necessary to supply it here. It is the business of the professors of history and the University teachers of the subject, as opposed to the college tutors, to provide this in Oxford; the professional training of historians is our proper function. In attempting this task we have two great advantages in Oxford. With all its defects, both on the literary and scientific side, the Modern History School does secure one result. In the main, it does give the men who go through it the foundation of general historical knowledge which they need in order to work profitably at particular parts of history. It supplies a basis upon which we can build in order to give men the professional training they require. ✓ ✓

The second advantage is that the University, by instituting the new degree of Bachelor of Letters, has provided the constitutional foundation upon which any scheme for higher historical education can be based.

A candidate may undertake 'a course of special study or research,' and at the end of that course his proficiency may be determined by examination, by the submission

of a dissertation, or by report of work done, as seems best to the Board of Faculty concerned. This statute is wide enough in its provisions to allow the organization of a definite scheme of teaching for intending historians, although in practice the 'course of special study' has dropped out of sight, and the research embodied in the form of a dissertation has been the only thing thought of. Yet the course of special study and the attempted piece of research should go together. For us the association of the two is indispensable. Whatever the case may be with men who have been through other schools in the University, those who have taken the Modern History School are not fit to undertake a piece of research at once, both from their ignorance of the right method, and from their want of the special knowledge necessary. Their stock of general knowledge, though an indispensable equipment, is not a sufficient equipment. If, for instance, a man intends to research in mediaeval history he must learn first how to decipher the documents with which he has to deal and get some knowledge of various branches of archaeology. Whether he intends to research in mediaeval or modern history he must acquire a considerable knowledge of historical bibliography. In both cases he needs some direction in his researches. If they are to be profitable either to himself or to others they must be guided by some definite aim, and by some special knowledge of the period he is working upon. A beginner needs to be shown where his labour can be employed to the best advantage, what problems in a particular period require elucidation, and where the materials exist for solving them. Here it is that an older student of the same period can help him by putting him in the right way

from the beginning, and saving him from waste of time and misspent effort. The ideal training for the young student of history is to research under some guidance, not only that he may be saved from possible errors and learn right methods, but to ensure that his labour shall secure some useful result.

Here in Oxford, I believe, we could organize courses of special study which would adequately train men for research in mediaeval or modern English history, so that they would be able to work independently when their training ended. I think that this could be done by the teachers the University at present provides. Take, for instance, the study of mediaeval English history. There is the Professor of Jurisprudence, ready to show men in his Seminar how to interpret the evidence of the Domesday Book or the history of the Manor. There is the Lecturer in Paleography ready to teach them how to read the handwriting of charters, pipe rolls, and other records, and the Lecturer in Diplomatic ready to teach them the method in which the various classes of mediaeval records should be studied. There is Professor Oman, an expert in many sides of mediaeval history and archaeology, able to give help and instruction to students; and some assistance might be expected from various college tutors too, because some have already promised their help. By co-operation, and by concentration upon some definite period for a definite time, these teachers could provide just the course of study and the systematic training for research which we need.

As to the provision of a course of study for men wishing to research upon more modern English history, I can only say what I mean to do myself. I propose to select for my teaching the history of England under the

Stuarts, or, to be more exact, the period from 1603 to 1714. This is a good training-ground for historical students, because it presents much the same kind of problems as more modern periods; while the mass of documentary and printed evidence is not so overwhelming in amount as it is in the case of the eighteenth or nineteenth century. In the second place, Oxford from the character of its libraries, and from the abundance of MSS. relating to that period to be found in them, offers exceptional advantages for its study. In the third place, the selection of this period has the additional advantage, that it will enable me to connect my teaching more closely with my private work so as to help my pupils more effectively, and to receive, I hope, some help from them.

I shall begin therefore by a series of lectures on the printed and manuscript authorities for English history between 1603 and 1714, showing what the materials for writing that history are and where they are to be found. At present there is no guide to the printed part of this literature except the fifty pages which Dr. Bass Mullinger devotes to the subject in the 'Introduction to English History' by himself and Dr. Gardiner; and this is not detailed enough or full enough for practical purposes. Moreover, at present there is no guide at all to show the student in which of the numerous collections of manuscripts in Great Britain the information he requires is to be found. These deficiencies it is the object of my lectures to supply. For dealing with the authorities for the study of Scottish history, I have fortunately secured the assistance of Mr. Rait; for the Colonial and American section I hope for help from the future Professor of Colonial History; the Irish part I shall undertake myself.

Secondly, I mean to form from amongst those who attend these lectures on the authorities in general, a small class for the critical study of one particular authority. By this I do not mean a class in which I should simply comment on the book in question, and give half a dozen auditors the results of my own inquiries into its value, but a class of some half-dozen who would co-operate with me and with each other in the attempt to examine and elucidate the text. Each must take part by getting up some particular passage or point, and communicating the result of his personal inquiries for examination and discussion. The joint result to be aimed at should be the publication of an edition of the author with critical annotations, and an estimate of his value: the individual gain would be experience in the methods of historical criticism. For this purpose I have chosen Clarendon's continuation of his own Life, which covers the period from 1660 to 1667. It treats of one of the most important events in English history, the Restoration Settlement in Church and State. And it has this double advantage; that the manuscript of the book is here to be consulted whenever it is necessary, and that Clarendon's correspondence is also in the Bodleian to be used in checking what he wrote from memory and in exile.

Thirdly, I trust that some of those who attend the lectures or the class will go further, and attempt some constructive work in the shape of a dissertation for the degree of Bachelor of Letters, or some other contribution to the history of the seventeenth-century period in question. It will be my part to direct their attention to the most suitable subjects, to suggest

how these subjects may best be treated, and to point out sources of information.

This is a modest programme, but a perfectly practicable one. It can be carried out, and it will effect its purpose. As you see, it rests on the principle of leaving to the tutors the education of the men reading for the school, and reserving for the professors and University teachers, with any help they can get from the tutors, the training of those who wish to carry their studies further. But the logical perfection of this division of labour is marred by one fatal defect. Professors of Modern History do not get any pupils here. The phenomenon is too constant to be purely accidental, or to be the result of merely personal causes. The chief reason is that the preliminary and general education given in the Modern History School is too lengthy and too elaborate; it absorbs all the time which most of the professors' hypothetical pupils can spend in the University. A conscientious professor cannot honestly try to induce a promising man who is reading for the school to come to his classes or work with him; he knows that thereby he would jeopardize the man's chance of success in the examination. He knows very well too, that by reason of our superstitious veneration for the class list, the failure to obtain a first would damage the man's prospects more than the acquisition of any special knowledge or training would improve them. As there is no place for professorial teaching in the school, he has to wait till the man is through the school. Generally by that date the man has spent all the time which he can spend at the University. He cannot afford to stay up any longer, he is about twenty-two; he feels that he is getting on in the vale of years, and

must betake himself to his farm or his merchandise. Even if he can afford to stay longer, the inducement to go through any higher historical training is lacking. The ordinary examination for a history fellowship is a competitive test of the same kind as the examination in the Modern History School. It is even more general in its character, and covers a wider range of subjects. More little essays, but again no chance for a man to show that he possesses the technical training of an historian, or has a special knowledge of any particular part of history. Again he is judged by work produced under conventional restrictions, instead of by work done under the normal conditions of historical composition. Occasionally, it is true, candidates are invited to submit published or unpublished work for inspection, but this is the exception, not the rule, nor is it certain what weight will be attached to such work. For these reasons, a candidate for a fellowship in history finds it more advisable to extend the area of his knowledge, so that he may be able to answer more questions, rather than to make it more thorough by going deeper into some one subject. The prospect of acquiring some special knowledge or technical training by going through some advanced course of instruction does not attract him, for it has no apparent utility, and he is too practical to be taken in by phrases.

In the same way, the man who looks for employment in teaching history does not see the use of submitting himself to such a training. The reasons which dictate the choice of colleges are wrapt in mystery. I venture to infer, from what I have seen during the last twenty years, that, after a man's place in the class list, the social gift called 'getting on with the men' is the qualifi-

cation that counts most. But I cannot infer from anything I have seen that the possession of a proper professional training for the study of history is one of the requisites held necessary for teaching it.

So we arrive at this result. Whenever any one seeks to alter the Modern History School in order to make it a better training for historians, he is met by the objection that it is not meant to give a professional, but a general training. Yet, at the same time, this training is regarded and accepted by all colleges as an adequate professional training. It is legal tender everywhere in Oxford, and like all paper currencies drives out better money.

This being so, neither a professor of Modern History here, nor any other teacher of the higher branches of that subject, can expect to attract the persons for whom the provision of advanced teaching in the subject might be supposed to be designed; namely, those who seek employment in the teaching of history here, and those who seek the rewards offered for its study. He must rely upon those to whom the new degree of Bachelor of Letters is in itself a sufficient attraction; that is, upon men who, for the most part, have laid the foundation of their historical education elsewhere, and come here to complete it, and to obtain an Oxford degree. For our own men this new degree has naturally less value, because they usually possess the B.A. already, and can obtain the higher degree of M.A. by a much simpler process than working for it.

Under these conditions, any scheme of advanced historical instruction, or postgraduate study in history, or anything of the kind under any other name, has little prospect of succeeding. It has been made practically impossible here for a professor of Modern History to

gather even a small band of pupils round him, unless he confines himself entirely to the elementary side of his subject. If he aims higher, as he is bound to do, his labour is made unfruitful by causes beyond his control. I have seen the experiment made twice; once by Professor Freeman and once by Professor York Powell. In each case it failed. Both may have made mistakes in the execution of their schemes; but neither diligence, nor skill, nor learning could succeed under the conditions with which they had to struggle. I am now about to try the experiment again; through the institution of the new degree the prospect is a little brighter; in other respects the situation is unchanged. However, the question is not whether I personally am to be enabled to teach my subject effectively, but whether any efficient and successful scheme for the higher teaching of history is to be established here. It is possible to do this with the existing means; we have the teachers, the libraries, and the money; but it cannot be done under the existing conditions. We must alter those conditions; and therefore I began by appealing for the co-operation of the other teachers of history and the sympathy of the University.

It would have been pleasanter for me, in first addressing the University, to avoid touching subjects upon which there is a division of opinion amongst us: but it was impossible to abstain. It was necessary to begin by pointing out the peculiar difficulties under which a professor of Modern History labours in Oxford, difficulties which have been felt and expressed by each of the four men who preceded me. Each of these suspended his private work to give himself to the service of the University. Each, in Milton's words, 'put from

beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies' to embark upon what his friends, in their letters of congratulation, called 'a wider sphere of usefulness.' Each was lured by the same hope, the hope of training scholars—that is, men capable of adding to knowledge—and found that the chief impediment was the system of historical education which the other teachers of his subject had organized. Some of you will remember the frankness with which Professor Freeman and Professor York Powell expressed themselves on the matter in familiar conversation. Others may have read the deliberate verdict of Oxford's greatest historian, that 'the historical teaching of history has been practically left out, in favour of the class-getting system of training¹.' That is as true now as it was in 1885.

I held it my duty to remind you of these things in the interests of the study I represent. For my part, I believe that the University sincerely desires that the higher teaching of history should flourish in Oxford, that we should give men here—our own men as well as strangers—not only the elementary instruction in the subject we provide now, but that kind of advanced instruction which other European Universities provide. Therefore it seemed well to explain clearly how this object may be attained, and what obstacles make its attainment difficult. For the difficulties are not natural difficulties which beset the teaching of history everywhere; they are local difficulties arising out of defects in our academic organization, difficulties of our own creation, which it is in our power to remove if we have the will. I am confident that we shall remove them.

¹ 'Letters of William Stubbs, Bishop of Oxford.' Edited by W. H. Hutton, 1904, p. 264.

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